

FISH and WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET**Meeting Date:** December 21, 2017**Agenda Item:** Sage Creek Special Chronic Wasting Disease Hunt 2018**Division:** Wildlife**Action Needed:** Final**Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation:** 20 Min

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Background: Chronic wasting disease (CWD) is an always-fatal neurologic disease like mad cow disease that affects deer, elk, moose and caribou. It usually takes 1½ - 2 years from animal infection to death. Given enough time, perhaps decades, to infect a large portion of a herd ($\geq 20\%$), CWD can cause population declines of $\geq 30\%$. There are no known risks to livestock or humans. On November 7, before CWD was found in Montana, FWP presented a draft CWD management plan to the F&W Commission that it adopted for public comment. FWP informed the Commission that if CWD was found before final adoption of the plan, FWP was prepared to put the plan in action.

CWD was found in a mule deer buck in Hunting District 401 on Dec. 4. As outlined in the draft Plan, FWP has assembled an Incident Command team and initiated a response, including plans for a Sage Creek Special CWD Hunt to determine disease prevalence in the infected herd. We have defined an Initial Response Area (IRA) around the known positive. Due to weather and pilot availability, area biologist Ryan Rauscher has not been able to do a flight to accurately census deer, but estimates there are approximately 400 mule deer within the 226 mi² area, which would require a hunter-harvest sample of 135 mule deer and selling 335 licenses to achieve that end.

We are seeking authority for a range of 250 to 400 mule deer B Licenses for the Sage Creek Special CWD Hunt licenses. In the event Ryan can do a flight and more accurately determine deer numbers before licenses are proposed to go on sale on Dec. 26 we would be able to adjust our sample and license sale needs. Licenses would only be valid within the IRA with antlerless-only and either-sex licenses issued in proportion to the sex ratio in the population (e.g. for 335 licenses the ratio would be 275 antlerless-only and 60 either-sex). Licenses would go on sale beginning Dec. 26 for the hunt to begin Jan. 6. The hunt will end when the required sample size is reached or on Feb. 15, whichever comes first. Special regulations, a map, and other specifics of the Sage Creek Special CWD Hunt are ready to be publicly disseminated upon approval of the hunt and have sent to the Commission for this meeting. All definition of the hunt and licenses are within statutory and Commission authority.

Public Involvement Process & Results: FWP has informed area residents and landowners of finding CWD and our plans for management with public information through several venues plus letters and public meetings. There have been repeated updates on CWD findings and FWP's plans plus public meetings in Havre and Chester.

Alternatives and Analysis

Proposals may be adopted as proposed, with adjustment, with additions, with deletions or no change from 2017 (status quo). No action would prevent the Sage Creek Special CWD Hunt from occurring.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale

Rationale for this proposal is included in Commission information packet and may be further articulated at the Dec. 21 Commission meeting.

Proposed Motion

REVISED: I move the Fish and Wildlife Commission approve the Sage Creek Special Chronic Wasting Disease Hunt consistent with Region 5 CWD license pricing and as presented by FWP.